RATIONAL
The engagement hypothesis of cognitive aging suggests that intellectual functioning may be enhanced in adulthood by a lifestyle rich in social and intellectual activities, so that healthy minds are engaged minds.

PROGRAM FRAMEWORK
The Senior Odyssey program was designed to promote cognitive functioning through mindful engagement with creative problem solving activities. Based on Odyssey of the Mind (www.odysseyofthemind.com), the Senior Odyssey engages cognition in the context of collaborative activity on a regular basis over a 20-week Odyssey season. Teams of 5 to 7 elders work together to develop solutions to problems exercising speed of processing, working memory, fluency, visual-spatial processing, and inductive reasoning in an informal context designed to be fun. The typical season revolves around one long-term problem selected by the team and numerous spontaneous problems. The Senior Odyssey season culminates in a tournament at which each team presents its solution to the long-term problem and competes in the solution to a novel spontaneous problem.

ACTIVITIES

Spontaneous Problems
Spontaneous problems are fast-paced and encourage participants to think on their feet. They are presented in cycles of problems of different types that increase in difficulty throughout each session. These activities encourage active problem solving in a collaborative context so that participants typically have to consider what others in the group have done and build on that.

Given
paper, pipe cleaners, cotton balls, foil, markers
Task
create a treasure map leading to the most important part of life

KNOWITNO

PICT RES

WHAT WE HAVE FOUND SO FAR
 Older adults who report more frequent engagement in different types of activities show generally higher cognitive scores
 Individuals who are mindful (i.e., awareness of alternative perspectives) and are open to new experiences, perform better on cognitive tasks
 Relative to wait-list controls, Senior Odyssey participants show increments in fluency and speed of processing, as well as in Mindfulness

CONCLUSION
This research suggests that contexts that create opportunities for intellectual engagement may contribute to maintenance of an active lifestyle and enhance certain aspects of cognition over the life span, thus facilitating successful aging.

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